A Question for Every Christian

Every generation faces the temptation to exchange biblical patterns for cultural preferences. Sometimes those changes involve worship. Sometimes doctrine. Sometimes moral values. Sometimes even the treatment of the dead. For thousands of years, God's people buried their loved ones with dignity, reverence, and hope in the resurrection. That practice united the patriarchs, the prophets, the apostles, and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Today, Christians have the freedom to choose, and sincere believers reach different conclusions. Yet before making that decision, every follower of Christ should ask:

Am I following the example of Scripture, or simply following the customs of my culture? Is Cremation Biblical?

That question deserves careful thought, prayer, and an honest study of God's Word.

Returning to the Burial Practices of the Bible

For thousands of years, burial was the accepted and honored way of laying the dead to rest among God's people. From Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to Moses, David, John the Baptist, the apostles, and finally Jesus Christ Himself, the consistent biblical pattern was burial. Today, however, cremation has become the choice of most Americans, including many Christians. This raises an important question: Has God's view changed, or has man's culture changed?

The word **"cremation"** is never commanded or recommended in Scripture. In contrast, the Bible repeatedly describes faithful men and women being buried with dignity and respect. Burial was not merely a practical necessity; it reflected honor for the body that God created from the dust of the earth.

Genesis 2:7 declares that God formed man "from the dust of the ground." At death, Ecclesiastes 12:7 says, "The dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it." Dust is the natural result of the body's gradual return to the earth through burial. Ashes, however, are produced by intense fire. Although both eventually become part of the earth, dust is the result of natural decomposition, while ashes are the product of deliberate burning.

Throughout the Bible, burial is the overwhelming pattern. Abraham purchased the Cave of Machpelah as a family burial place. Jacob instructed his sons to bury him there. Joseph's bones were carefully preserved and later buried in the Promised Land. Moses was buried by God Himself. Jesus was lovingly placed in a new tomb by Joseph of Arimathea, and His resurrection came from that tomb—not from a funeral pyre.

The New Testament records several resurrections performed by Jesus and His apostles. Lazarus was raised from a tomb. Jairus' daughter was restored to life. The widow's son at Nain was raised. Dorcas was restored by Peter. Eutychus was revived by Paul. Every recorded resurrection involved someone who had been buried or whose body remained intact. **Scripture records no example of Jesus or the apostles raising someone who had been cremated.** While this observation does not prove that God cannot resurrect someone who has been cremated, it is noteworthy that every biblical example follows the pattern of burial.

The Jewish people regarded burial as a sacred duty. Great care was taken to wash the body, wrap it respectfully, and bury it before sunset whenever possible. Family tombs preserved the memory of generations. Burial demonstrated reverence for God's creation and hope in the future resurrection.

By contrast, many ancient pagan nations commonly practiced cremation. Greeks and Romans often burned their dead, believing the fire released the soul from the body. Early Christians generally distinguished themselves from these pagan customs by continuing the Jewish practice of burial. Burial became one of the visible ways Christians expressed their belief in the resurrection of the dead.

Returning to the Burial Practices of the Bible continued...

One modern argument in favor of cremation is cost. Fifty or sixty years ago, many people believed cremation was primarily chosen by families who simply could not afford or plan for a traditional funeral and burial. Today, however, that situation has changed dramatically. Even among Christians who can afford burial, cremation has become increasingly common. Convenience, lower expense, mobility of modern families, changing cultural attitudes, environmental concerns, and shifting social customs have all contributed to its widespread acceptance. The question for Christians is whether convenience should outweigh biblical example.

Some Christians argue that cremation cannot prevent God from resurrecting a person because God created Adam from the dust of the earth and has the power to restore life regardless of what has happened to the body. That conviction emphasizes God's unlimited power. Others respond that the issue is not God's ability but whether believers should follow the consistent biblical example of honorable burial.

Cremation also completely destroys the body's remaining organic tissues and greatly degrades recoverable DNA. While this has no bearing on God's power to resurrect the dead, some Christians view the deliberate destruction of the body as inconsistent with the biblical pattern of treating the body with honor. They note that the body has been called a temple of the Holy Spirit during a believer's life and believe it should be treated respectfully after death as well.

Ultimately, the issue is larger than personal preference. It concerns whether Christians should seek to imitate the examples found in Scripture or follow changing cultural trends. For nearly four thousand years, God's faithful servants practiced burial. Jesus Himself was buried. His followers buried their dead. The apostles never instructed Christians to adopt cremation, nor is cremation presented as the preferred practice for believers.

Modern society has changed dramatically in the last century. Cremation has become common, accepted, and often encouraged. But Christians must ask themselves an important question: Should our decisions be guided primarily by culture, convenience, and economics—or by the example and principles found in God's Word?

Every believer must answer that question personally. Regardless of one's conclusion, the Bible consistently presents burial as the pattern practiced by God's faithful servants, pointing believers toward the hope of the resurrection when Christ returns.

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